File: Autopsy photos & X-rays

18 January 1969

Mr. Fred P. Graham
The New York Times
Times Square, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Graham:

I have read with interest your story on the Kennedy autopsy photographs and X-rays in today's issue, as well as the earlier story which appeared on the 17th. In further coverage of this matter, I hope that you will find it possible to clarify a number of points which must concern students of the assassination.

It is noteworthy, for example, that Dr. Milton Helpern and Dr. Cyril H. Wecht have not been granted an opportunity to examine the photographs and X-rays, as had been requested some two years ago by the then-Congressman Theodore R. Kupferman. Was any consideration given to including either of these forensic pathologists on the panel that was invited to examine these materials? How were the four members of the panel selected?

Dr. J.J. Humes testified (Hearings, Volume II, page 361) that "X-rays were made of the entire body of the late President." The panel reported, however, that parts of the body had not been X-rayed. In view of the known erratic and unpredictible course that a projectile or fragment may pursue ("showing up in the most astounding places in the body," according to Dr. Helpern, as quoted by Marshall Houts in Where Death Delights, page 61), does not the possibility remain that a bullet or bullet fragments were lodged in a part of the body for which there are no X-rays?

The panel has concurred explicitly in the measurement of the entrance wound in the back as 14 centimeters or 5½ inches below the tip of the right mastoid process. This measurement was made on the prone body. Robert Forman of Wisconsin State University has pointed out in an unpublished monograph (excerpt and illustrations enclosed) that in the erect position the same wound would measure 7 to 7½ inches below the tip of the right mastoid process, placing the wound in alignment with the bullet holes in the coat and shirt and requiring a horizontal or ascending trajectory to the Adam's apple. If so, the shot could not have come from a sixth-storey window.

The panel examined the autopsy photographs and X-rays on 26 and 27 February 1968 but wrote its report only in April. What was the reason for this lapse of time?

The New York Times and other news media have reported the four-man medical panel were the "only outsiders" to view the photographs and X-rays. William Manchester has, however, alluded in his book The Death of a President (published on 7 April 1967), pages 156-157 fn., to three experts ("each a stranger to the other two") who had examined the photographs and X-rays. Is Manchester incorrect?

Yours sincerely,

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Enclosure

cc: Peter Kihss
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